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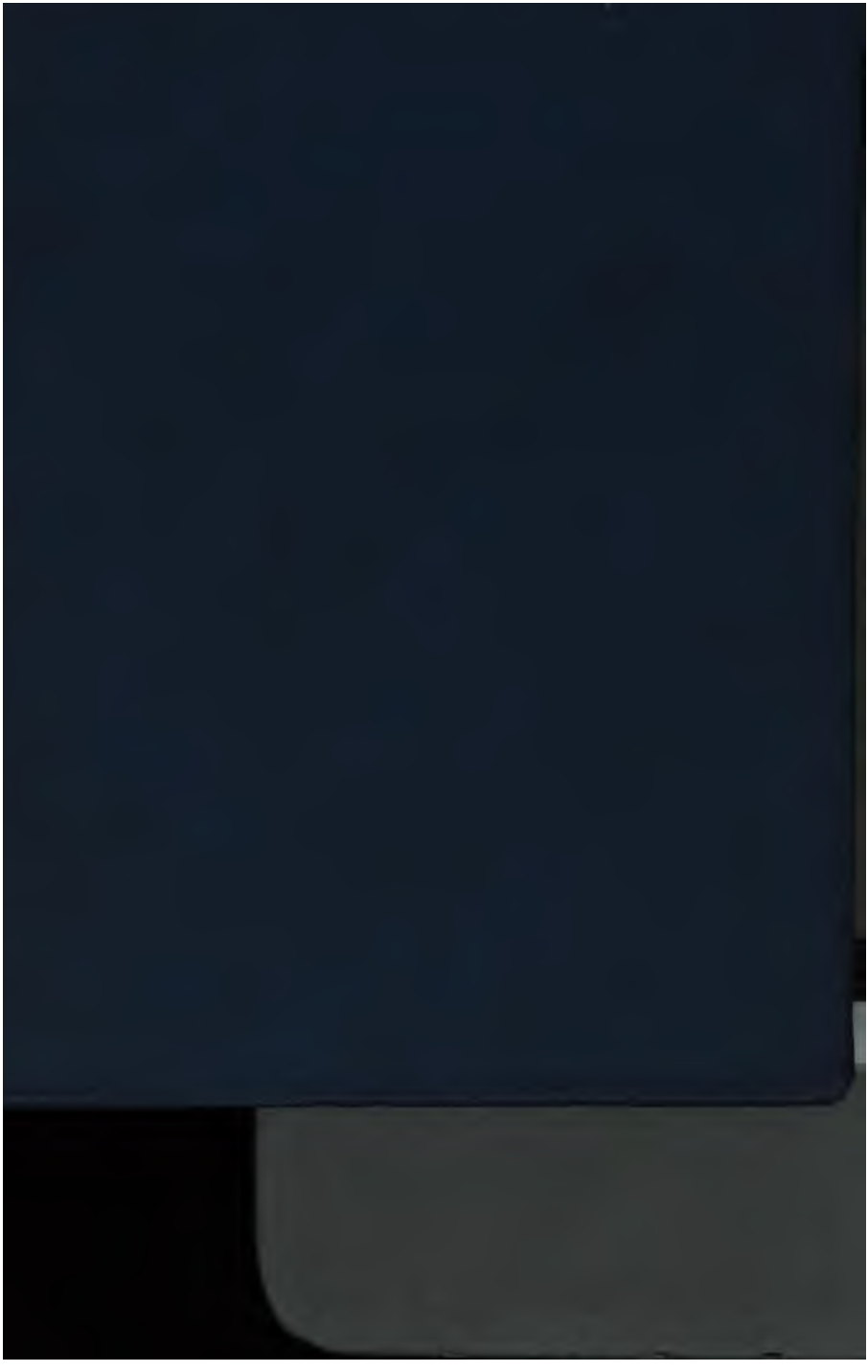

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SANGSTE

When Angels Come to Men ❧ ❧ *By Margaret E. Sangster*

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Author of
Janet Ward
Winsome Womanhood
Lyrics of Love, etc.

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New York Chicago Toronto
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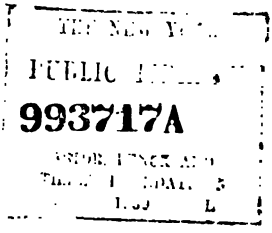

To the Dear
Memory of My Mother

WUR 19 FEB

Several lyrics are inserted in the course of this volume by the kind permission of their authors.

FOREWORD

A TENDER interest has been with me, sweet as a remembered strain of music, while writing these pages. There are some among my friends who have not forgotten my beautiful mother, so fragile, so exquisite, so long a dweller in the land of Beulah, before her "toilsome days" of pain and languor were ended, and she went home. During the latter years of her life, she was always half in heaven, and her thoughts were often about her departure to be with her Saviour and to meet her dear ones gone before. "One of these days, when you have time, promise me that you will write a book about the angels," she said, and I promised. In this little study of our heavenly helpers, I have found a great deal of inspiration and cheer, and I pass it on, for the comfort of those who dwell in the house of mourning

now, but who may yet, even here, be thrilled by echoes floating down from the halls of feasting, where the saints abide with Jesus, and go no more out.

Those who read the Book lovingly, will discover far more about the angels in its mystic revelation, than I have dared to include in what is only a fragment from the great cluster of truth about the shining ones.

Margaret E. Sangster

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WHAT WE READ IN THE BOOK

Three Angels.

Come, go, on errands all divine, ye three
Commissioned ones, great ministers, that do
His pleasure, hearkening to His voice, ye who
Fulfill His word, in strength excelling; ye
Whose names recorded in our human tongue
Repeat the unknown accent of the word
They speak in heaven, when your names are heard,
Between the notes of mighty anthems sung!
Bearers of benison to men, ye come and go!
Thou Raphael, Healing of our God, and thou,
The strength of God, blest Gabriel, chosen so
To bear from God to men access of might,
And Michael, thou art as God, whose brow
Shines peerless, like a flaming fire of light!

MRS. MERRILL E. GATES.

ONE

WHAT WE READ IN THE BOOK

IN ancient days remote in the dim vagueness of the morning world, men looked for angel guests and were not disappointed. Sometimes in the hush of night, under the solemn stars, a wayfarer might see a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, the rounds of which were trodden by angel feet, ascending and descending. Again in the tremulous sweetness of the early dawn, when the sky grew bright and golden and the birds began to sing in copse and hedge, angels came walking over dew-wet fields, or encamped around beleaguered cities. At high noon they glided into homes where men sat at meat, or at eventide they sat beside men in the tent door. Nobody seemed surprised or alarmed or disturbed at a vision of angels; their forms majestic and commanding, their faces serene and compassion-

ate, their voices clear and vibrant struck no terror to the hearts of men. It was as if earth had a door ajar through which heavenly visitors came and went, and heavenly harmonies swept, and heavenly fragrance was wafted, and men and women then had an intimate converse with God, fuller, closer, more spontaneous than most of us now enjoy. As we have drifted farther away from the ideal of the child ever in the Father's house, we have lost our birthright of fellowship with the Father's angels.

The Book in which we read about our Father, and which speaks to us of His love, and conveys to us His instructions, is melodious with the rustle of angel wings. In many a page, we hear them like music; we are never amazed when we meet an angel messenger or listen to an angel message in any chapter of Old Testament history, in any story of bard or prophet; in any quietly told account of what happened in the New Testament dispensation, after our Lord had come to dwell among men.

Color and music, motion and swiftness,

stately appearing of a single herald, tumultuous rush of a mighty throng are in the Book. Angels are always taking part on the stage of that superb drama of the centuries which the Book has preserved through changing dynasties from the earliest days until now. Entrance upon Eden with sword of flame. Exit, only when the new heavens and the new earth shimmer in the translucence of Jerusalem that is the Mother of us all.

The Book begins in a garden, and it ends in a garden. In our material age, we have little use for gardens, we would rather have gold mines. But the gold of the Book is not sordid, and tinged with greed as our gold is apt to be; it is sunlit as the yellow sheen on the maples in the hour of Autumn's coronation, as the yellow of the daffodils when spring comes dancing over land and sea. It is pure gold ever, whether it be for the ornaments of the Lord's house, or the lamps before His altar, and in Revelation it is never opaque, nor dull, but quivering, gleaming, transfused with light and softly radiant. Such gold may the angels have worn when

God sent them on errands to kings. But I do not imagine that they always came in white raiment with fringes and mantles of royal gold. They came in other guise, dressed in the rough homespun of laboring men, or with loins girt like those who travel in haste; they were sometimes not to be distinguished from the common folk about them, nor from the dusk that enfolded and hid them from view.

They never had time to waste, these couriers of the Most High. Whatever was their errand, they did it, and were gone; gone as the wind goes when it has sped a ship or rocked a forest, or cleansed a town of some evil disease. They tarried for no gossip; they were never other than messengers who were neither kin nor acquaintance, who being aloof, and being on service, had their duty to do and might not linger.

The old masters have tried to draw them, and the old poets to show forth their wisdom and their beauty in matchless verse. But the angels elude all pens, save those of inspiration. "Are they not all ministering spirits

sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" sums up in a sentence, the whole mission, the marvel of these beings of another world, who have so often and so potentially, mingled with and influenced our little planet, for its weal or its warning, its bliss or its dole.

Do the angels ever visit us now? Ah, yes, I would not like to believe that they have lost their way to our hearts and homes.

> "Still through the cloven sky they come
> With peaceful wings unfurled,
> And still celestial music floats
> O'er all the weary world.
> Above its sad and lowly plains
> They bend on hovering wing,
> And ever o'er its Babel sounds
> The blessed angels sing."

In how many an hour of discouragement, in how many a place of trial, in how many a home of bereavement, are God's angels present. We may be too deaf to hear, too blind to see them, too slow of heart to let them draw near, but they do, nevertheless, bring us blessings from above. The cloud lifted, we knew not how, the burden was

eased of its weight, and the pang grew less acute; we walked onward with freer step and firmer bearing. We felt courage renewed, we were aware of strength that no mortal hand had brought. Surely our Father, whose angels often came to the relief of our Elder Brother in His hours of sorest need, yet bids them go to any child of Adam's race, who is tempted, or tried, or who fears that he is forsaken of God.

Then, there are the children's angels! In the multitude of dangers, seen and unseen, in the long path that stretches before the little feet, how comforting it is to think of the special guardian angels, watchful over children by day, brooding over them by night.

> "Hush my babe! lie still and slumber.
> Holy angels guard thy bed,"

sings the mother in her lullaby. Shall we not believe they do? When the babe smiles, when the child has a beautiful dream, let us fancy that the angel of the child is whispering some pleasant thought, to make the pillow softer, and the sleep more restful.

And for us all, when the mystery of sleep falls on us, and we are new-created for life and its toil, is it not sweet to say,

> "I lay my body down to sleep;
> Peace is the pillow for my bed;
> While well-appointed angels keep
> Their watchful station, round my head."

IN THE WORLD'S GRAY DAWN

Hark! hark! my soul! angelic songs are swelling
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore;
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling
Of that new life when sin shall be no more!
Angels of Jesus, Angels of light,
Singing to welcome
The pilgrims of the night.

—FABER.

TWO

IN THE WORLD'S GRAY DAWN

I. At Eden's Gate.

WHEN Adam and Eve went sorrowfully forth from Eden, its lovely morning all obscured by sin, the Lord placed behind them sentinels of cherubim, with the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. Never by that gate could man return to Eden's purity and peace. And as it was then, it has been ever since in the story of mankind. Driven into exile from any Eden of innocence, by our own willful transgression of God's law, we cannot retrace our steps, for the angel with the flaming sword is forever on guard. No persuasion, no repentance, no endeavor can turn the edge of that heaven-tempered weapon; no tears nor pleading can melt the heart of that stern warder. He is not there however,

merely to keep the sinner out. His office is, to keep the way of the tree of life that perennially bourgeons in the Edens of God, and to defend it against the incursions of those evil legions whose arch-fiend once creeping in, taught man the fateful lore that lost him paradise. Yet, are those angel guards not all unkind. In the light cast from their sword of flame man found the best gift God could bestow upon the race, the need of earnest work, and the power to do it. Drudgery? Yes, but drudgery that wears a crown upon its brow. In the very moment that sentence was pronounced upon the erring, the promise was made of a benediction that should follow the toiler, rewarding him day by day, and giving him evermore harvest for seed time, reaping for sowing, bread for the labor that made him hungry, joy of resting when eventide bids the laborer cease from his task. Cherubim that kept the way to the tree of life, your grave eyes bent upon our first father and mother had kindness and pity in their depths! You had seen them in the garden, ere the spoiler touched it. You saw

them worsted in their strife with temptation. You knew how wily and how terrible was that fallen angel whose revenge on heaven was fain to be wrought out when Eve's hand reached for the forbidden fruit. God bade you keep the way that the tree of life should remain untouched, that tree, which transplanted to the gardens above, flourishes ever more and bears twelve manner of fruits, and hath its leaves for the healing of the nations. And it is written that where that tree grows, they shall go no more out, and His servants shall serve Him. So answers bell to bell in the symphony of the divine Book.

And while the Cherubim stood sentry-wise at Eden's eastern gate, the children of men grew and multiplied. They were nomadic, pasturing their great flocks wherever there was springing grass, and wherever they might dig a well and find water. They built towns and dwelt in them, with walls and towers for defense. The vast plains were covered with cattle; Jabal, born to Lamech, heard in the arms of Adah, his mother, the song of the wind and the ripple

of the grain. He became the father of all such as dwell in tents. But Jubal, his brother, heard sweeter melodies in breeze and gale, and lovelier voices floated to him from hills and wolds, and he became the father of such as handle the harp and the organ. Then, too, the arts and industries had their origin, and patiently experimenting and rudely fashioning, Tubal-Cain found out how to make cutting tools of brass and iron.

And all the while the cherubim maintained their guard at Eden's lonely gate. For the harp and the organ had in them a plaintive memory transmitted through the generations from Eve, who longed and wept and could not forget.

Her son, after long years, was he who invented instruments of music, and the rougher, more practical nature that first discovered what tools and weapons might do, drew its inspiration, somehow, from him, to whom God first gave commandment to till the ground. These signs manual of use and beauty were legacies from a lost Eden.

II. By Tent Door and Desert Path.

Centuries slipped by in the world's gray dawn, as the dune sands drift before the wind, as the dews lift in the sun. Swiftly, imperceptibly, unhaltingly, went on the ceaseless procession of the years. In a land of peace and plenty, a youth of noble aspect and thoughtful temper, herded his sheep on the great plains, and communed with God by starlight and moonlight. Even then, the old Chaldeans read the scroll of the stars as an open book, and heard Jehovah speaking to them as the winds blew and the trees waved. Abram was a young man who saw visions and heard voices, and the visions and the voices made him restless. He must arise and go, leave the familiar, seek the strange, forsake the tranquillity, dare the hostile spears of men unknown, find out what lay on the other side of barriers that hemmed him in. As God spoke to him so has God spoken in every period, winningly, peremptorily, to others of His choosing, sending them from ease and luxury to hardship and painful effort, for the sake of an ideal. "Now faith

is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The things which are seen are temporal, the things which are unseen are eternal."

The stalwart pioneers, the gallant mariners, the hardy explorers, the valiant soldiers, the sweet master-singers, the heroic missionaries of the earth, have thus been God-called to go out, often not knowing whither they went. They have had the courage of their convictions. Strongly have the claims of kindred, of home, of use and wont tugged at their hearts, but in vain. When the roving drop suffuses a man's blood, he cannot sit still. As the bird blindly obeys the migratory instinct, so the man compelled by something too strong for him to combat, boldly challenges the mysterious and unrevealed; only in his case, obedience is not blind, for he follows something higher than mere instinct.

God called, and Abraham went into the unknown at His call, but not alone. Over that caravan by day in the long slow march, over the encampment by night in the wilderness silence, invisible angels hovered. The suspi-

cious desert peoples were held in check; the stealthy prowling desert beasts kept outside the circle of the camp-fires, but neither the chief nor his band of soldiers and shepherds knew how often peril was warded away and safety brought nigh by a cohort from the skies.

"And the Lord appeared unto Abram by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day, and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him."

The patriarch hastened to offer hospitality; food, water, rest, and comfort. By this time Abraham was old as we count age, and his beautiful wife, childless and inconsolable therefore, was also old. The Oriental wife has always longed to be the mother of sons. To the Hebrew woman, no calamity seemed worse than barrenness; the woman who bore many children was most envied, honored, and praised. Sarah had given up the hope of ever having a child of her own, and the expedient of adopting into her love, the child of her husband by her maid Hagar,

though of her own devising, had miserably failed on the reef of jealousy and wounded pride. Ishmael she could not endure. Hagar, she barely tolerated. The message of these wayfaring angels was a wonder and delight to her, for they brought the good news that she was to have a son of her own. That son, Isaac, came in due time to the tent of the desert sheik. And he brought laughter with him, and great joy. He was the child of a seer, gentle, obedient, a dreamer of dreams.

But his mother had not in her nature the nobility which her great gladness should have awakened in her soul. Listen to the story so full of human nature. "And the child grew and was weaned and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bond-woman and her son; for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abra-

ham's sight on account of his son. And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad and because of thy bond-woman; in all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. And Abraham rose up early in the morning and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulders, and the child, and sent her away, and she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs, and she went and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot, for she said, Let me not look upon the death of the child. And she sat over against him and lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad

and hold him in thy hand for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad and he grew, and he dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt."

How tender that touch in this beautiful Biblical idyl, where the angel comes to comfort the mother because the Lord had heard the moaning of the stricken child!

How we limit our great Lord. Is not His greatness most shown in His power to care for the little? The Master has told us that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father's knowledge. Surely we may carry all our griefs to Him. Through the songs of heaven, He heard the cry of the bondwoman's child, dying under the desert shrub, and He sent His messenger with speed, to give the lad new life, and the mother hope.

III. The Dreamer by the Wayside.

We are always applying modern standards to men who were governed by the ethics of a primitive civilization. Hence, an almost universal condemnation has fallen upon Jacob, who deceived his father, an old man and blind, winning the blessing and the birthright from Esau, by scheming and trickery. Esau, the hardy hunter, bluff, virile, courageous, appeals to us and awakens our admiration. He was not wax in his mother's hands, nor did he stoop to keep by an unworthy device, that which was his own by right and of which his younger brother shrewdly robbed him by an unscrupulous deal. We would regard such conduct as Jacob's as most unworthy now, and we find it difficult to excuse him for it, as we read it in the graphic page of the author of Genesis. But, this must be said, that with all his weakness, his wiliness, his low idea of personal honor, Jacob was among the first men in the ancient world to seek and to know God. Because he sought God and tried to understand His will, he was nobler, notwithstanding the

blots on his record, than the man whose desires were satisfied with appetites of the earth. And abundantly as Jacob suffered his life long, first as a fugitive and an exile from home, next as a lover cheated of the wife he had wooed for seven years under sun and rain, and deceived and forced to serve for her another seven years; again deceived and wounded in his deepest affections by his own scheming sons, still God always was with him. Though at the last he said, "Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage," yet in the agony of death, he could exclaim, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord," and in a rhapsody of surpassing insight could prophesy the future of his children for many generations. He wrestling with the Lord, through the long watches of a night of tremendous spiritual struggle, won His cause, and the angel of the covenant said to him, "Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for thou hast striven with God and with men and hast prevailed." First of that order of mystics who have seen God face to face, was Jacob, whom once

and again, angels met, and who wrestled with the Lord of angels in that lonely night by the ford of Jabbok.

But this tremendous experience was long after the time when the tired, fleeing, homesick, broken-hearted boy, on his way to the land of the children of the East, had that dream that was a revelation from the skies.

"And Jacob went from Beersheba, and went towards Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed and behold a ladder set upon the earth and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God, ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and

in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold I am with thee and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awakened out of his sleep, and he said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of heaven."

A stone for a pillow, hard earth for a bed, but a dream that was so bright, it showed the wanderer what we are ever forgetting that heaven is never distant nor God beyond call. Angels traversed the ladder, but the Lord stood above it.

IN TIMES OF TUMULT AND STRESS

"Nearer my God to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.

"Though like the wanderer
The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.

"There let the way appear
Steps unto heaven;
All that Thou sendest me
In mercy given.
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee."

THREE

IN TIMES OF TUMULT AND STRESS

I. An Angel's Call to a Land's Defense.

ALL through the history of Israel the clash of arms incessantly sounds. An obstinate border warfare, seldom intermitted, rages with sullen fury, and the children of Edom, of Moab, of Midian, are continually ravaging the coasts of Israel, devastating their harvest fields, levelling their cities, and carrying the flower of their youth into captivity. "Slain with the edge of the sword," is a phrase continually repeated. Indeed the blue gleam of steel is as scintillant and as ominous in Old Testament narrative, as in any later story of wars and men, in any later age. The land so often in the throes of the struggle with Edom, had been at rest forty years. It might have had rest for longer, but "the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the

Lord," and the Midianites, their sworn foes, came swarming up against them, and "the Lord delivered them into the hands of Midian." Gloomy times these for a young man who loved his country and feared his God. Such a man, of noble family and straightforward character, a man like George Washington for simple courage and unstained honor was Gideon. As no one stirred in the matter, and he was obscure, the youngest and least considered of his father's house, Gideon brooded over the state of affairs, and no doubt prayed over it, but he did not mope or sulk or neglect "the next thynge." He was at work threshing wheat, a homely, every-day task, when lo! a shadow on the floor, and a voice in the room, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Gideon looked up amazed, to meet the eyes of a kingly stranger who commanded him to leave farm and field and family and take the lead in the breaking of the hateful Midianite yoke from the necks of a prostrate people. Later on, when after miraculous proof given to establish his confi-

dence, and by divine command, Gideon surprised the immense host of the foe by a foray in the night, with a picked company of three hundred men, his war cry was, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

A magnificent battle cry this for you and me in whatever hour of need, whatever enterprise, whatever emergency, we face inimical circumstance, or stubborn enemy. The sword of the Lord, yes! None shall stand before it, but it is His will that it shall be wielded by human hand, and that human strength shall guide it on to victory. The sword of the Lord and of Cromwell, the sword of the Lord and of Washington, the sword of the Lord and of John, or Willie, or any other brave fellow who is fighting a battle for right shall prove invincible.

> "For right is right, since God is God,
> And right the day must win;
> To doubt would be disloyalty,
> To falter would be sin."

To more than one of us, fainting and faltering, but looking God-ward for help, and home-ward, church-ward, child-ward in the

strong desire to be of service, an angel voice has spoken, though haply we never saw the angel form. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Thus are the Great-hearts ever sent out into the open, to carry the standard of Jehovah!

II. Under the Juniper Tree.

Who does not sympathize with the prophet Elijah, most virile, most impressive and dramatic of prophets, when, his long career of strife and victory more than half over, he throws himself prone on the ground under the juniper tree, ready to die. He had come from the desert, its own son, a man like the mighty rushing wind, a man of elemental force, and he had feared not the face of clay. He reminds one of Martin Luther, of John Knox, of the old Covenanters; he is the stuff of which reformers are made; he has no craven terror of Ahab, nor of the assembled prophets of Baal, and it is no shame to him if, for a while he does shrink from the proud Tyrian princess, Jezebel, Ahab's unscrupulous wife, the Lady Macbeth of the Bible. When

Jezebel threatened, the prophet knew there was danger ahead.

The scripture narrative is of Homeric simplicity and strength. There had been a prolonged drouth, three years when there was neither dew nor rain. Famine had come with its terrible misery. The streams were dry, the grass was burnt up, there was food for neither man nor beast. At last the spell was broken. The prophet foretold the coming abundance of rain. "Make ready thy chariot," he said to the king, "and get thee down that the rain stop thee not."

"And it came to pass that in a little while the heaven grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain."

Ahab rode hurriedly to the shelter of his palace, at Jezreel, but the prophet girded up his loins and ran before him, his avant courier.

When Jezebel, aghast at the tidings, heard of the fate that had befallen the prophets of the false God, she vowed a stern vow that she would avenge them. "So let the Gods do unto me and more also, if I make

not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." Her messenger brought this defiant threat, and Elijah fled. He arose and went for his life. And under the juniper tree, weary and exhausted, he begged God that he might die.

Commenting on this scene, the Rev. F. W. Robertson says,

"On the reception of Jezebel's message, Elijah flies for his life—toils on the whole day—sits down under a juniper tree, faint, hungry and travel-worn; the gale of an Oriental evening, damp and heavy with languid sweetness, breaking in his face. The prophet and the man give way. He longs to die. You cannot mistake the causes in part purely physical.

"We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Of that constitution which in our ignorance we call union of soul and body, we know little respecting what is cause and what is effect. We would fain believe that the mind has power over the body, but it is just as true that the body rules the mind. Causes apparently the most trivial; a heated room, want

of exercise, a sunless day, a northern aspect, will make all the difference between happiness and unhappiness, between faith and doubt, between courage and indecision."

At the instant of Elijah's deep depression, the Lord, who later fed the five thousand in the wilderness, who had earlier made the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse enough for the needs of the house which was his servant's asylum, the same Lord, who in the wilderness, sent manna to be His children's bread, was ready with help.

Exhausted, Elijah slept. "And behold an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked and, behold, there was at his head a cake baken in the coals, and a cruse of water. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time and touched him and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose and did eat and drink and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

Among the temptations that easily beset us, most of us may be aware of a tendency to doubt God's power and wish to aid us in our temporal affairs. We are in financial straits, but we do not think it worth while to tell the Lord; the children need shoes; the boy at college must stop his work and come home, unless funds for the next term drop from the sky, but—we do not tell the Lord. We ought to repair the house; the roof leaks, the windows rattle; yet we do not tell the Lord. The board is scantily spread, but we do not pray for literal daily bread. Our feeling is that in the realm of prayer, our Lord cares only for spiritual necessity and endowment, so strangely we limit His grace; we fancy that He, who is omnipotent in the large, is unable to see and care about the little. Here in Elijah's story is a lesson for every one of us. His servant, the prophet was hungry. An angel touched him and there was food prepared and waiting. God was not in the plenitude of His Fatherhood, above assisting a fainting, famishing man, with a cake baken on the coals. Let us be

reminded by this scene of one that occurred centuries later, by the shores of Galilee, where the lake, storm-tossed all night, subsided at dawn, and peace fell upon its waters.

The Saviour, crucified and risen from the dead, is now the minister of homely comfort to worn-out and disheartened men. All night these stout fishers have toiled, but morning breaks, and they have caught nothing. Jesus, unrecognized by them, seemingly but a friendly stranger, stands on the beach, and calls familiarly, "Children, have ye any meat?" They answer, No. The stranger bids them try again, tells them to cast their net on the right side of the ship and they shall find. Obeying, they are not able to draw in the net for the great multitude of fish shining and struggling in its meshes. Others take a little boat and rush through the surf to help them with the marvellous catch; spent, drenched, famished they drag in their spoil.

"As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon

and bread, and Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish ye have now caught."

Could there be anything lovelier, more exquisite—more intimate, than this stooping of the risen Lord to feed His weary disciples? No angel now to do this errand, the task is the Lord's own. Did He not say, "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find," and "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of *before* ye ask Him."

Whether an angel, at the Lord's command, lit that fire of coals, by the sea in the damp cold morning, we do not know; we are not told. But let us glance over the story of our daily lives. Has there never been a time, when help shut out everywhere else, we have had it so directly from God, that to Him alone have we rendered our thanksgiving?

I sometimes like, when all my way seems barred,
To mind me of the story told of one,
Whose faith the dawn of Britain's freedom starred
Ere yet had beamed the rising of the sun.

Brave Cuthbert, who from tending of the sheep
On wind-swept hillsides bleak, near Lammermoor,
Went forth the Master's scattered flock to keep,
And preach His love who says, "I am the Door."

Once, tossed upon an angry boiling sea,
His boat was dashed upon a dreary shore.
Heart-sick, and like to die, his comrades three
Cried: "Cuthbert, let us perish,—hope is o'er,

"The furious tempest shuts the water-path;
The snow-storm blinds us on the bitter land."
"Now wherefore, friends, have ye so little faith?"
God's servant said, and stretching forth his hand,

He lifted up his reverent eyes and spake:
"I thank Thee, Lord, the way is open there!
No storm above our heads in wrath shall break,
And shut the heavenward path of love and prayer."

Sweet to me come old Cuthbert's words to-day;
Sweet is the thought that Christ is always near;
I seek Him by the ever-open way,
Nor yield my courage to a shuddering fear.

The storm may darken over land and sea,
But step by step with Christ I walk along;
Dear Christ, the storm and sun are both of Thee,
And Thou Thyself art still my strength and song.

If we could get ourselves quite clear of the conventional idea of angelic messengers, we would sometimes find that in modern days, God employs earthly ministers to do angelic work. As for instance, in Putney, in the early part of the eighteenth century, when William Law, son of a shopkeeper, non-con-

formist, divine and saint of God, needed money sorely, not for himself, but for his charities. He stood by the doorway in a crowded thoroughfare: an unknown man in the dress of a gentleman's servant stepped up to him and handed him a letter, containing a bank-note for a thousand pounds. No clue to the donor; the man who had brought the letter was gone as suddenly as he had come, but there was the address of Rev. William Law, and there was the munificent gift.

God is still as able to answer prayer, to relieve want, to uplift the discouraged, as He has ever been in any day of any age since the world began. Nor is He less ready to hear and help.

III. At a City's Gate.

Elijah went up to heaven, not by the common way of death, but transported by a heaven-sent escort in a chariot with horses of fire. The brilliant gleaming vision over, Elisha picked up the prophet's fallen mantle, and with it assumed the dignity and grandeur

of the man who had worn it. Elijah had been a rough-hewn son of the desert; Elisha was a born aristocrat: both were leaders of men. The times were tempestuous still. Wars and rumors of war on every hand. Israel threatened, beleaguered, sometimes overwhelmed, again victorious.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God had told him and warned him of not once nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing, and he called his servants and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my Lord, O king, but Elisha the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the word that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

"And he said, Go and spy where he is

that I may send and fetch him, and it was told him, saying, Behold he is at Dothan. Therefore sent he horses and chariots and a great host and they came by night and compassed the city about, both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto Elisha, Alas, my master, what shall we do? and Elisha answered, Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

We have grown accustomed to the angel who comes as a solitary messenger, even to the angels who come in groups. Here is an army. "Thinkest thou," said the Master on the night that He was betrayed, "that I cannot now pray to My Father; and He shall presently give Me twelve legions of angels?"

Wherever heaven may be, it is the place of residence of the King of kings, and the retinue must suit His glory. Rank upon rank,

magnificent, innumerable, the angels of God, a vast obedient, disciplined host, are in that wondrous realm. And when God wills, a detachment of these, may, viewless, fly through space, to aid those whom God sees are in peril.

Our prayer should be for vision. Oh, fools and blind, we do not see, we tremble because we cannot see. At the gates of our Dothans, we cringe with the hearts of servants, when we might stand erect and invincible, in the attitude of princes. Many a day has the mountain before us been filled with God's horses and chariots, but we did not know it, because we had no faith, and we forgot to pray.

One understands that a man like Elisha communed with God, prayed, so incessantly, that he was in continual touch with God. Says Saint Theresa, "That prayer is the most acceptable, which leaves the best results. That is true prayer. Not certain gusts of softness and feeling and nothing more. I would fain live more nearly as I pray."

Could we realize that our whole life with God enters on the domain of the supernatural, is not bounded by the area of our mortal capacity, we should be far stronger as well as far happier in our Christian experience.

In Du Maurier's fanciful story, Peter Ibbetson, you remember, that Mary Sereskier, after death, is permitted to come back and have an interview with the poor lover who has gone insane for lack of the dream-visits she paid him when she was still alive. The book is a fantasy, an extravaganza, what you will of the wildly impossible, but when Mary tells her friend that in that other life there is not the hampering of the body, nor any dependence on the clumsy contrivances of eye and ear, but that one hears the minutest quaver of sound, as well as the great symphonies, that one sees everything, everywhere, to the uttermost bounds, that one is no more handicapped and fettered, she intimates what we shall be in the future home and life.

Not only the angels may be sent for our

relief, the Lord may use our kindred and friends, who have gone as His dear message-bearers. Very likely He often does. Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe put suggestively how it might be, when she wrote:

"We are encompassed about by a cloud of witnesses, whose hearts throb with every effort and struggle, and who thrill with joy at every success. How should this thought check and rebuke every worldly feeling and unworthy purpose, and enshrine us, in the midst of a forgetful and unspiritual world, with an atmosphere of heavenly peace! They have overcome — have risen — are crowned, glorified; but still they remain to us our assistants, our comforters, and in every hour of darkness their voice speaks to us: 'so we grieved, so we struggled, so we fainted, so we doubted: but we have overcome, we have obtained, we have seen, we have found,—and in our victory behold the certainty of thy own.'"

AN INTERLUDE

"They stand those halls of Zion,
Conjubilant with song,
And bright with many an angel,
And all the martyr throng,
The prince is ever in them,
The daylight is serene,
The pastures of the blessed
Are decked in glorious sheen.

"O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect.
Jesus, in mercy bring us
To that fair land of rest!
Who art with God the Father,
And Spirit, ever blessed."

FOUR

AN INTERLUDE

Concerning Dreams.

IN the far days when our world was in its childhood, our Father often spoke to His people in dreams. With utter simplicity the Bible tells us how prophet and king and disciple and apostle had revelations from heaven during sleep. We have grown incredulous of dreams and visions, and have, practically, removed farther than those old-world children from the idea of personal and intimate communion with God. Few of us know the blessedness of expecting direct guidance and tender friendship in our intercourse with Jesus Christ, and yet we are within our privileges in looking for both. Not often perhaps does the Lord vouchsafe to us a dream of Himself and of the mansions prepared, nor is it needful that He should, since we are not now in the twilight

of the dawn, but in the noonday of clear effulgence. Yet sometimes, I believe, that He does even now thus comfort those who are especially dear to Him, because especially feeble and trustful. And, for aught we know, there are emergencies now, when He comes with the visions of His glory to sustain the fainting and strengthen the faltering soul.

Dreams, as we experience them, are often bewildering and, so to speak, chastening mental endeavors, when the brain, reminiscent of the daylight's pleasure or pang, takes up and carries on fragmentary processes to incomplete conclusions. Humiliating predicaments are very common in dreams. Who has not wakened in great relief from a dream in which half-clad, or almost naked, or improperly dressed for an occasion, he has mingled in a throng of ceremonious people on a gala night? Who does not know the labyrinthine dream, in which he wanders through room after room, through suites of palatial apartments, or warehouses packed with treasure, to come out suddenly, and

without apparent reason upon a squalid street dimly lighted and leading to a shadowy river? A favorite, or at least a frequent, dream of mine, carries me through extensive shops, draped with Oriental tapestries and rugs and scented with mysterious odors, always absolutely untenanted, so that I am the solitary wayfarer in the dim richness of the strange interiors. In a time of anxiety or great weariness I always dream of snow, and of pushing forlornly through heaps and drifts of ice-cold masses, white and ghost-like, but never getting anywhere. That is the weird of most of our dreams; they are a story to be finished in our next, only our next never comes.

A dear friend assures me that her dream of misfortune is associated with horses. Red horses with her are a sign of loss of money; or some lessening of income, or financial disappointment. White horses signify the death of a friend or near kinsman. One cannot shake her faith in these warnings of ill-omen. For my part I do not try. We are so ignorant of psychic phenomena, so

utterly unaware of anything beyond the narrow standing ground of the literal fact, which we can see and weigh and measure, that most of us balk at the realities which emerge from the realm, so near us, of gray mystery and silver shadow. What possible connection can exist between horses and calamity or sorrow, I cannot imagine, except that in my friend's case her moss-trooping ancestors in old Scotland may many a time have hobnobbed with death on a pale horse, and many a time, mounted on a red steed, have ridden knee-deep in blood in the wild days that tried men's souls.

Why not believe in dreams, as suggestions made to us from the outside, by angels or by demons, as God may please to let them visit us? This belief may coexist with the usual impression that they are the operations of the half-slumbering brain, some cells of which are not hushed in the peaceful oblivion of the nightly rest. Not long ago I heard a missionary who had lived in Peking through the fearful siege of 1900 say, "There are people who doubt miracles. I do not. I have seen

the Lord work them, not once, not twice, but again and again, in Peking." She saw these miracles in lurid daylight. I have seen strange things in the dreamland, things oddly incongruous, yet fitting into the actual in an adjustment so nice, that I cannot but feel that some dreams come true.

For a year of loneliness, and heart-break, a mother grown old, had mourned the loss of a dearly loved daughter. Their companionship had been constant, the bond uniting them, one of singular strength and closeness. They had been always most congenial, and the daughter was to the mother as a flower to the stem. The daughter went home first. Twelve months thereafter in the early chill of a winter's morning, the mother called one of the family into her room. Her sweet worn face was radiant, as of one whom God had comforted. "I want to tell you my beautiful dream," she said. "Isabel was here. She was all in white, glimmering, translucent white; she stood in a square place (the city lieth four-square) and she smiled at me. She was lovely like a bride.

'Mother,' she said, 'you have grieved long enough. Do not grieve any more. I am coming for you, in just a month.' "

No one in the household regarded the prediction seriously; the mother did not dwell on it at all. Nevertheless she too, a month from that day, was "away," gone to the dear abiding home of God's saints, where the inhabitants shall never say, "I am sick."

During a long absence from my girlhood's home, my people moved to a house in which I had never dwelt with them, and with which I have no associations. Yet when I dream of them, my dream singularly locates them, all for years in heaven, in that special house, and three times recently I have dreamed the same dream, identical in its sequence and in the smallest detail. And, when I awake, it is as if I had been making a visit back in the sweet old years, when around me were those who had common store of family anecdotes and traditions, common stock of memories and common fund of joys that never end.

Whether or not God speak to us in dreams, He does eternally to every new generation

speak through the medium of the imagination, divinest faculty of the human mind. Where reason halts on crutches, imagination soars on wings. Through its potent mysticism we enter upon regions, ethereal and sublime, regions where the bird flies, though the earth-worm may not crawl. Faith and imagination are twins; one who has small dower of the latter, will have hard shift to keep fast hold on the former.

It is no dream of bard or seer, but a visible approaching reality that when we see, not through a glass darkly, but face to face, we shall fully know each other, and know ten thousand things, the very alphabet of which is sealed to us to-day. For Christ is warder of the future where our absent loved ones are with Him, and though here, the things which are seen are temporal, there, the things which are unseen are eternal.

Longfellow's line, "Not as a child shall we again behold her," has been received by some as a message of consolation, and by others with something of protest. The mother longs to clasp again in her arms the

little one she lost, there have been so many years in which her soul has been famished in its yearnings for heaven and her desire to enfold her darling again in the rapture of reunion. But if the child had remained, no greater trial could have been imagined than that it should not grow up. Its development would have been the dearest joy of the home. Under the tutelage of the angels, has the child not grown in the heavenly land?

One of my friends parted with her only child in his beautiful infancy. Years passed, and her husband left her for the home across the sea, and she was desolate in her fair house set amid bowers of summer bloom. Day by day her loneliness oppressed her. Night after night her pillow was wet. One night God sent her a beautiful dream. She saw her husband not white and thin, not tortured with pain, but noble and strong as he had been in his prime, his countenance shining with happiness. Ever by his side was a younger man, lovable, attractive, radiant, and about this youth there was something familiar, yet baffling, and his look be-

witched her, and caught at her heart. "Who is that with Dick?" she asked of one who stood by smiling.

"Why, do you not know? That is the boy you lost so long ago; your son and his. You have two waiting for you, do you not see?"

That precious dream gave her new courage and calm resignation. It was indeed a waft of balm from shores where the trees of God are ever green.

ANGELS OF RESCUE

O Paradise! O Paradise!
The world is growing old;
Who would not be at rest and free
Where love is never cold,
Where loyal hearts, and true,
Stand ever in the light,
All rapture through and through,
In God's most holy sight.

—FABER.

FIVE

ANGELS OF RESCUE

I. In the Fiery Furnace.

WE lift the curtain which hides an ancient and brilliant civilization, when we step from our modern life into the story of Daniel. That young man, a Hebrew of princely lineage, had, with a great throng of others, men, women and children, been carried captive to Babylon, in one of the wars, which six hundred years before Christ, Nebuchadnezzar waged with Jehoiakim. It was the custom of the Eastern kings to educate for their own service young men of rank and parts, who might further their ends in court and camp. That these men should become idolaters was of course expected, and some there were who cast aside the faith of their fathers and bowed to the false gods, through indifference or fear, or selfish ambition. Yet these recreants and

renegades were sure to be in the minority. As a rule, the Hebrew clung to his creed which he had been taught by his parents, put his trust in Jehovah, and refused to mingle in the vain sacrifices offered in strange temples. Few among the captive Hebrews, had the wonderful courage of Daniel and his dauntless trio of friends, though many of them may have joined in the chant,

"By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."

Daniel came to notice first, a youth of goodly stature, and fair to look upon, when the king, accustomed to absolute rule, threatened with immediate death, all the astrologers and magicians in his domain, unless they at once performed an impossibility.

In the night upon his bed the monarch had been troubled by a dream, the impression of which remained with him, while the dream itself had faded from his mind. He demanded to be told both the dream and the interpretation. A manifest impossibility. Dismay reigned in the realm. "The Chaldeans answered before the king and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter, there is no king, lord, nor ruler that ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer or Chaldean, and it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is no other that can shew it before the king, except the gods whose dwelling is not with flesh. For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain."

Now comes the moment of Daniel's appearance on the stage, where for the course of a long life he was to be conspicuous. He asked leave to be presented to the wrathful king. He and his friends together, sought

the aid of God in united prayer. The dream was revealed to him, and in turn, he revealed it and told its meaning to Nebuchadnezzar.

The rapid rise of Daniel and his friends excited bitter envy and malignant jealousy on the part of those hitherto high in the councils of the king but now displaced.

Playing adroitly on the monarch's vanity, the crowd of flatterers around him, induced him to build a colossal image of gold, in honor of his own prowess and achievements, to set it upon a plain where all might see its magnificence, and to issue a mandate that every one in the vast dominions of Nebuchadnezzar should worship it, paying it the homage due to a divinity. The penalty of refusal was widely advertised by a herald who went forth, crying out the command and the punishment of disobedience.

"Whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

Almost universal was the homage rendered the golden image; almost as universal as the homage we, in the twentieth century

after Christ render to gold, and material success, or whatever gold may stand for. But there were brave exceptions. The envious watchers presently reported that certain Jews who had been set over the affairs of the province of Babylon went about their affairs as usual. "They serve not thy gods nor worship, O king, the image that thou hast set up."

The narrative is graphic, a model of terse brevity and dramatic contrast.

The three brave children of Israel were called into the presence of the angry king. "Is it true," he exclaimed, "this thing that I hear, that you dare defy my authority, and pay no attention to my threats? Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Instantly from the lips of Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, flashed back the reply, one of the sublimest in history.

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. Our God, whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it

known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

There was no interval between sentence and execution. Instantly the decree was issued, instantly the mightiest men of the army leaped forward, bound the defiant Hebrews and threw them into the midst of the red cavern of tormenting flames.

"And these three men, Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego fell down, bound, into the midst of the burning fiery furnace."

Then occurred an amazing thing. "Nebuchadnezzar the king rose up in haste and said to his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered, True, O king. Lo, said the king, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Thus to these fearless servants of the Most High was the word fulfilled, "He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea in seven there shall no evil touch thee, neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh."

Given, equal confidence, equal submission, equal obedience, and from what furnace of affliction shall not the Lord deliver His own, to-day, as in that old day in Babylon? Our God, whom we serve, is yet able to deliver us from any danger. His angels yet have charge concerning us, in any hour of peril or testing.

Which of us has not in memory "a day in golden letters to be set amid the high tides of the calendar," when we knew that no earthly hand was stretched to save us, but that from the skies, a hand reached down, and set our feet in a large place. Most comforting is the assurance that to His servants, in the very heart of the fire, God sent no angel to loose the bonds, and bid them walk erect and triumphant, but that this was one of those grand theophanies which prefigured the incarnation; that our Lord came in person and delivered His champions in the sight of the hostile king and his legions.

The beautiful catechism of the Reformed Church begins with this question, "What is

thy only comfort in life and death?" and this is the answer, "That I, with body and soul, both in life and death belong unto my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil, and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation and therefore by His holy spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready henceforth to live unto Him." A little farther on in this noble formula of faith, occurs this question, "What comfort is it to thee, that Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead?" Again the answer rings with a peal of victory. "That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head, I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me, with all His

chosen ones, to Himself into heavenly joys and glory."

With uplifted head we expect our Lord from the skies, what time we are in sore distress, what time we are beleaguered, what time flesh and heart faint and fail; then, indeed, is "the eternal God our refuge and underneath us are the everlasting arms."

Do you remember Bunyan's story of the martyrdom of Faithful? "Then went the jury out, whose names were Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-good, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-Lust, Mr. Live-Loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-Mind, Mr. Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-Light, and Mr. Implacable; who every one gave in his private verdict against him among themselves, and afterwards unanimously concluded to bring him in guilty before the judge. And first among themselves, Mr. Blindman, the foreman, said, 'I see clearly that this man is a heretic.' Then said Mr. No-good, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth.' 'Aye,' said Mr. Malice, 'for I hate the very looks of him.' Then said Mr. Love-Lust, 'I can never endure him.' 'Nor I,'

said Mr. Live-Loose, 'for he would always be condemning my ways.' 'Hang him, hang him,' said Mr. Heady. 'A sorry scrub,' said Mr. High-Mind. 'My heart riseth against him,' said Mr. Enmity. 'He is a rogue,' said Mr. Liar. 'Hanging is too good for him,' said Mr. Cruelty. 'Let us despatch him out of the way,' said Mr. Hate-Light. Then said Mr. Implacable, 'Might I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled to him; therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death.'"

And so they did; therefore he was presently condemned to be had from the place where he was, to the place from whence he came, and there to be put to the most cruel death that could be invented.

They therefore brought him out, to do with him according to their laws; and first they scourged him, then they buffeted him, then they lanced his flesh with knives; after that, they stoned him with stones, then pricked with their swords; and last of all, they burned him to ashes at the stake. Thus came Faithful to his end.

Now I saw, that there stood behind the multitude a chariot and a couple of horses waiting for Faithful, who (so soon as his adversaries had despatched him) was taken up into it, and straightway was carried up through the clouds with sound of trumpet, the nearest way to the celestial gate. But as for Christian, he had some respite, and was remanded back to prison: so he there remained for a space. But He who overrules all things, having the power of their rage in His own hand, so wrought it about, that Christian after a time escaped and went his way."

Some one once came to Brother Giles, a saintly follower of the good Francis of Assisi, saying, "Father, if in our time there should fall some great adversities and tribulations what should we do then?" Whereunto replied Brother Giles, saying, "My brother, I would have thee to know, that if the Lord were to rain down stones and lightning from heaven, they could not hurt us nor do us any harm, if we were such as we ought to be, for if man were truly what he

ought to be, every evil and every tribulation would be turned into blessings; for we know what saith the Apostle, that all things work together for good to them that love God; and so likewise to the man of evil-will all good things are turned to evil and to judgment."

Blessed be the Lord, that no dread of fiery furnace, nor of darkest night of pain and anguish need oppress or depress our souls. Blessings, O Father, for our trust in Thee!

> "Thy ministering spirits descend
> To watch while thy saints are asleep,
> By day and by night they attend
> The heirs of salvation to keep.
> Bright seraphs despatched from the throne
> Repair to their stations assigned;
> And angels elect are sent down
> To guard the redeemed of mankind."

II. In the Den of the Lions.

Nebuchadnezzar passed away in his pomp and pride. Belshazzar followed him, and he too passed away. Then came in the reign of Darius, the Mede; Darius, a famous warrior and statesman, seventy-two years old. Daniel is not now a young man. He is in the prime of his strength, his eye is keen, his

judgment is mature, and he wears the dignity of white hair and snowy beard.

Darius organized his government and made Daniel his prime minister; "this Daniel," says the Scripture chronicler, "was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him and the king thought to set him over the whole realm."

Again is repeated the story of internal dissension, of strife and intrigue. Malice persistently seeks occasion against Daniel, but finds neither error nor fault. They decide, these foes who are implacable because self-willed and self-absorbed, that if any occasion is discovered against Daniel, it will be found concerning the law of his God.

There was a stupid old law of the Medo-Persians to the effect that no edict of the king could be repealed. Trivial or important, the word once spoken must stand. The king was as the Almighty, his fiat was omnipotent and unchangeable.

Assembled now the presidents and princes, and on the throne sits the great king. All are profuse in congratulations on his power

and majesty. Everything redounds to his glory. "King Darius, live forever!"

They bow before him. They crave, with lowly obeisance and profound genuflexion, that he will affix the royal signature to the decree they have framed, making it an unalterable statute, "That whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man, for thirty days, save of thee, O King, he shall be cast into the den of lions."

King Darius signed the decree.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

When the king was informed of this and was made aware of the trap into which he had inadvertently fallen, he was "sore displeased with himself," a very unusual frame of mind for an Oriental sovereign. All day, from early morning till the sun went down, he labored to deliver Daniel, but no loophole offered itself for his help. The foolish

Medo-Persian stubbornness tied his hands. Daniel, still tranquil, still praying, must be cast to the furious beasts of prey. But the king said a word of consolation to the man immensely his superior in kingliness. "Thy God, whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee."

"And a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that his purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel."

The night hours passed, leaden footed. No sleep for Darius. The musicians dared not touch their instruments. Behind the purdah, the women watched and wondered; up and down the tessellated pavement of marble paced the sleepless king. Night passed, and suddenly, in a glory of rose and silver, broke the full light of the Eastern morning. Then in haste and in sorrow went the king to the den of the lions.

"O Daniel," he cried, "servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

A voice, as of a man who had slept and was refreshed, not lamentable and anxious like the king's, gave instant response.

"O king, live forever. My God hath sent His angel and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me, forasmuch as before Him innocence was found in me, and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt."

Who wears the "white flower of a blameless life" need fear no evil. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

Daniel was as safe amid the lions, as in his own house; safer indeed, for outside the den were spite and hypocrisy and malice; spies and informers dogging his every step, but the lions held in leash by angel-keepers, could not harm the servant of Jehovah.

Once more in the history of Daniel there is a scene of wonderful suggestiveness. Communing constantly with his Father, Daniel learned more and more of his Father's purposes, and the days that were to be, in mystic vision unrolled themselves be-

fore him. He saw his people as they were to know strange changes, to be sometimes down-trodden, to be often, for their sins, in eclipse, and groping in the dark because the divine favor was removed. And under the burden of the revelation, the spirit within him grew faint, and words died upon his lips. Mute and sad he lay upon the ground in the posture of mourning and discouragement. The story goes on, "and behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my Lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my Lord talk with this my Lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, and said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened,

and said, Let my Lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me."

"O man greatly beloved!" Can we doubt whose was the voice that spoke those words of assurance? When the "Lord of angels leads us on the battle-fields of life," we may well arise and be strong. Here as to others, came the Son of God, not yet incarnate, but assuming the likeness of man, that one who needed the Elder Brother's help might receive it, and have a glimpse of the eternities to uplift him from his faintness.

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining,
Low lies His bed with the beasts of the stall,
Angels adore Him, in slumber reclining,
Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all.

—BISHOP HEBER.

SIX

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

"Joy to the world, the Lord has come,
Let earth receive her King."

I. The Angel with the Lily.

IN what cloistral quiet did that fair virgin of Judah spend her childish years, we do not know, for on this subject the Book is silent. Yet she must have been the fair daughter of a devout home, trained in reverent ways, and alert in ministries of love. Little did she dream, as she went about her home tasks, or sat at her mother's feet, that upon her head was to be poured the honor, on her heart the burden laid, of bringing forth the Christ. Ages ago, in rapt vision, Isaiah had exclaimed, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and shall bear a son, and shall call His Name, Immanuel." Ages still earlier, a patriarch on his deathbed, had foretold that the sceptre should not depart from Judah

until Shiloh came. The Book is radiant with divine intimations. Always there are stars rising in the silver sheen above the horizon, prefiguring the Star of Bethlehem.

One day, as Mary sat in her mother's little house, tranquil, contented, a strange trouble invaded her soul. "Her eyes were homes of silent prayer." She was made presently to feel that she was not alone. Her mother was away talking with some kindly neighbor. Her father and her brothers were somewhere at their daily toil, Joseph, her grave betrother, was busy in his shop; she knew how steadily he worked, how fragrant were the woods which he wrought into tools and plows and furniture; not much more than a child herself, she had liked to watch the yellow shavings curl from under the plane and fall glittering to the floor of the carpenter's little room.

Mary!

A gentle voice, clear and low, yet full of authority, spoke her name.

In the doorway stood a stranger, robed in white linen, in his hand a lily, purer than the

snows of Carmel, sweeter than the rose of Sharon. A stranger with a message meant for her only. Wonderful were the words he spoke, each falling on her ear with a distinctness that fastened it in memory forever.

"Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women. Fear not for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the House of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

And Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word."

Then she rose, and in haste and tumult of feeling, not comprehending, but wholly accepting the will of the Lord, went to pay a visit in the quiet household of Zachariah and Elizabeth, for the angel had told her that Elizabeth of the silver hair, many years a wife,

but childless, was also to bear a son. Every one rejoiced among the kindred, in Elizabeth's good fortune. Reluctant motherhood was unknown in that land and those days.

Elizabeth came to meet her young guest, a stately figure, with white tresses, but a light as of triumphant youth in her eyes. To her had been given the foresight of the seer, she hailed her young kinswoman as the mother of the Lord. First to greet the coming Messiah among the children of men, was a woman, under whose heart beat the slender pulse of another life, a woman hallowed as woman ever is, by the beautiful promise of maternity. "And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with His

arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy. As He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.

"And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house."

In sequestered peace, away from the babble of the town, away from the questioning of those who came and went, Mary spent the months when first she realized that she was with child. Many a day that vision of the angel was with her in memory, filling her with gladness. The whiteness of the lily was in her every thought.

Weary hours were before her, a toilsome journey, a lowly place wherein to face the hour of supremest pain. Poor young mother on whose life already lay the shadow of the cross, though God's crown of dignity was on her brow, a crown of thorns.

II. Under the Star.

Three kings, tradition tells us, journeying with a retinue, traversed the desert paths, guided by a star, of such golden lustre as earth had never seen before. They were learned men, astrologers, and by the signs they read in the sky, they were anticipating the coming of a mighty ruler. Their caravan fared onward, the star leading the way. It does not appear that these eastern princes knew with certainty what kind of monarch they should find, or speculated as to whether His birth should be in a palace or a hovel. They were obedient to their heavenly vision, and wherever the star should end their wanderings, there would they pay their homage and leave their gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh.

One night, as they travelled, they knew that their errand was accomplished. The star stood still over a stable in Bethlehem, a little mountain town in the land of Judea.

Let us stop a moment and read over here Alfred Dommett's Christmas hymn.

In the Fullness of Time

"It was the calm and silent night,
Seven hundred years and fifty-three
Had Rome been growing up to might,
And now was queen of land and sea.
No sound was heard of clashing wars,
Peace brooded o'er the hushed domain;
Apollo, Pallas, Jove and Mars,
Held undisturbed their ancient reign,
In the solemn midnight, centuries ago.

"'Twas in the calm and silent night!
The senator of naughty Rome,
Impatient, urged his chariot's flight,
From lordly revel rolling home;
Triumphal arches, gleaming swell
His breast with thoughts of boundless sway;
What recked the Roman what befell
A paltry province far away,
In the solemn midnight, centuries ago!

"Within that province far away
Went plodding home a weary boor;
A streak of light before him lay
Fallen through a half-shut stable door
Across his path. He passed, for naught
Told what was going on within;
How keen the stars, his only thought.
The air how calm and cold and thin,
In the solemn midnight, centuries ago!

"O, strange indifference! low and high
Drowsed over common joys and cares;
The earth was still—but knew not why—
The world was listening unawares,

How calm a moment may precede
  One that shall thrill the world forever!
To that still moment, none would heed,
  Man's doom was linked no more to sever—
In the solemn midnight, centuries ago!

"It is the calm and solemn night!
  A thousand bells ring out, and throw
Their joyous peals abroad and smite
  The darkness—charmed and holy now!
The night that erst no shame had word,
  To it a happy name is given,
For in that stable lay, new-born
  The peaceful Prince of earth and heaven,
In the solemn midnight, centuries ago!"

III. Angels of the Christmas Morn.

From the mystic, dreaming East, came those who were ready to hear the song of the angels. The world, so long tossed with wars, to and fro, like a tempestuous sea, was at peace. Rome was unquestioned mistress of all the inhabited globe. Greece, with her stores of learning, her art, her love of beauty, was ensphered in calm. Palestine, conquered, obscure, of little value in the eyes of the Cæsars, held firmly the thought of God. The sages from the East, by the desert path star-guided came to Palestine.

In the Fullness of Time

In the solemn midnight, centuries ago, the temple flocks were pastured on the hills. Faintly came through the brooding darkness the cry of a lambing ewe. The shepherds were awake and vigilant, there was the mystery of motherhood there too, among the bleating sheep. On the edge of the hills was ever the menace of the prowling wolf, fain to carry off a lamb from the fold. Huddled together for warmth, the white fleece-clothed creatures slept undismayed, for were not the shepherds with them, and did not each shepherd know his own sheep by name? The night was cold, the shepherds gathered their shaggy cloaks closer around them, and wished for the day.

They knew no more than the wise men from the East, that Mary with her infant child was lying in the straw of the stable, with the cattle looking on, for in the inn there had been no room for the travellers and the mother whose hour had come upon her. The Book tells us how she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

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"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And, lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you this day is born in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.

"And suddenly, there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace; good-will towards men. And it came to pass as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

Thus with a chorus of such melody as earth had never known, and never will know until the Lord shall come again, the Christmas angels sang over Bethlehem.

Only the simple hearted heard them, and the poor. He came to save His people from their sins, and it was the common people who should first hear Him gladly when He spoke as never man had spoken before.

Do you notice that the angels without exception sound the call to a dauntless courage and an invincible faith? Fear not, they cry. Fear hath torment. Perfect love casteth out fear. Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom, over everything that opposes, most of all, over fear.

Sings Milton:

> "But see the Virgin blest
> Hath laid her Babe to rest;
> Time is, our tedious song
> Should here have ending.
> Heaven's youngest beamed star,
> Hath fixed her polished car.
> Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending
> And all about the courtly stable,
> Bright harnessed angels
> Sit in order serviceable."

Though Protestants cannot accept the doctrine of the immaculate conception of

the Virgin, yet few can fail to recognize the tender sweetness of the lines by Rev. John B. Tabb, a devout and gifted priest of the Roman Church.

CHRIST THE MENDICANT.

A stranger to His own
He came; and one alone
  Who knew not sin,
His lowliness believed,
And in her heart conceived
  To let Him in.

He naked was, and she
Of her humanity
  A garment wove;
He hungered, and she gave
What most His heart did crave,
  A mother's love.

WHEN THE PRICE WAS PAID

Be hushed my heart, remembering
What dole was given for thee.
How pressed on Him thy burden when
For all the sinful sons of men
Christ went to Calvary.

But heart, in love and prayer, look up
Beyond the awesome tree;
The heaven of heavens is reft to-day,
All angels march the starry way,
That leads from Calvary.

SEVEN

WHEN THE PRICE WAS PAID

I. The Gloom of the Garden.

IT was after the last supper, and the traitor had gone on his errand of infamy. The Lord, with the three disciples who were nearest Him among the twelve, went out in the chill midnight, and in the stillness of Gethsemane, prepared for the final struggle. The three and thirty wonderful years were almost over. He who for man's redemption had put on our flesh, was soon to yield up his earthly life in inconceivable agonies of shame and torture. Of that life He had expressly said, "No man taketh it from Me. I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again."

Through the crowded years of His ministry, so filled with acts of kindness and compassion, through the homeless years when He

had not where to lay His head, through the growing bitterness of priest and Pharisee, how one phrase rings out, like the tolling of a solemn bell, "Mine hour hath not yet come!" When that hour came, Christ was impatient to meet it, and we are told that on the last journey His feet were swifter than those of His disciples.

He saw in vision maddened throngs;
He saw the crowded hall
Where scribe and priest should mock and flout
Where cruel scourge should fall.

He saw the cross, its shadow lay
The toilsome pathway o'er
But, pressing on with ardent soul
The Master went before.

To-day, Thy pledged disciples Lord,
Meet sorrow, pain and shame;
Their watchword in the fiercest strife
Thine own all-conquering Name.

Though flesh be weak and spirit faint,
And heart be spent and sore;
They cannot fail in any strife
While Thou shalt go before.

The terrific darkness of that hour, when even the three loyal friends slept, heavy with sorrow, not faithless nor unsympathizing,

but too weary to keep slumber from their eyes, was borne by the Master alone. For us, whose Gethsemanes too must be endured, though never one may be like His in extremity of woe, there are two thoughts. One is that the anguish of that vigil was purely mental. A horror of unmeasured dread and agony crucified the Master's soul, before the thorns scarred His brow, or the scourge rent His flesh, or the nails pierced His hands and feet. By a more exceeding weight of anguish, He bore our sins in the garden than on the cross. Mental suffering is more torturing than physical. In the hour of great bodily pain, there often comes an immense spiritual relief and exaltation which makes the soul scornful of the most poignant pangs, indifferent to the thrusts of the last enemy. Our Lord drank the bitterest brew that our sin could offer Him, in the shade of Gethsemane's olives, and there, rather than on the cross, He was assailed by malignant throngs of invisible foes, principalities and powers of evil, that had fought against man and exulted when he was exiled from Eden, and that now,

vainly, battled against that Son of Man, who was also Son of God.

In that hour of extremity of mental anguish, Christ was alone! A stone's cast only, but a world's width between Him and His disciples. And there on the ground He kneeled down and prayed, saying, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done."

There appeared, then, in that moment of surrender, an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

The great crises of experience, the crucial tests of life, are met and borne alone. In the hours of our deepest trials, no human friend can bear us company. The nearest and dearest may walk a little way with us, may enter the garden, may sit down under the olives, but further they may not go. Allied as we are to the Divine, every human soul has its solitudes into which it can call no human

helper. Into its desert places none may go with it. Always there will be the stone's cast between the soul and its next of kin, its most beloved companion, when the beat of God's flail winnows self-will from its highest purposes, and the soul surrenders and in fullness of rest, cries to the Father, "Thy will be done." When mortal aid cannot be given, heavenly help shall not fail. Then, may be looked for, the angel sent with the strong hand, the gentle touch, the word from the throne that will bring relief.

II. The Angels of the Resurrection.

After our Lord had endured the cross, and cried in triumph, "It is finished!" the few who had loved Him spent a period in a Gethsemane of their own. For they did not believe that He was ever coming back, Joseph's tomb for them was the end of all things, the final and overwhelming catastrophe, and their Master's words were to them now as idle tales.

Nevertheless, in the gray dawn of the third day, woman, who had been last at the

cross was earliest at the tomb. To Mary, the loving and the grieving was given the first vision of the resurrection. She had seen the tomb, empty indeed, but in order, for the Lord had not left it with haste or in flight, and the clothing he had worn was lying folded there. Peter and John too, puzzled and bewildered, had seen the vacant tomb, and had gone, in the silence of a renewed bereavement, to their home.

"But Mary stood without at the sepulchre, weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. They said to her, Why weepest thou," but they did not tell her that Christ was risen, for as she turned, Himself addressed her in the old familiar tones, by the old familiar name. St. Matthew's account of the resurrection angels is vivid as a picture.

"In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was

a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and become as dead men.

"And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.

"And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring His disciples word.

"And as they went to tell the disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.

"Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me."

As was fitting, angels opened and closed the sacred drama. Forty days after the

resurrection our blessed Lord, ascended in the sight of many assembled disciples and was received into the heavens, a cloud veiling His glory as He went. "And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner, as ye have seen Him go into heaven."

Even so, come Lord Jesus. We await Thy second coming; to set the wrongs right and make the crooked things straight. And for us, we have but to do our work as Thou givest it for us to do, until the day break and the shadows flee away.

THE ANGEL AT THE PRISON GATE

Lord, make my spirit still!
All things that vex me, or alarm,
Can happen only by Thy righteous will
Who nothing sendest to my harm.
Thy powerful hand brings changes one by one,
But what Thou doest is well done.

Let me be still and trust,
While Thou art dealing grievous things,
Thy love enfoldeth him who from the dust
Flies to the shadow of Thy wings,
And who in Thy strong wisdom rests and waits,
The gale shall bring him precious freights.

EIGHT

THE ANGEL AT THE PRISON GATE

TROUBLOUS times assailed the early Christian Church. They were so few, a feeble flock, these followers of the Nazarene, like their Master, despised and rejected of men. Strange audacity of faith, that made this handful of obscure disciples so brave, that sent them forth to conquer the world for Christ. Bonds and imprisonments, mockings and scourgings, cruel martyrdoms awaited them. In Rome, the cry of "The Christians to the lions!" was soon to be heard, and the saints in Cæsar's household were to hold their own with dauntless heroism in the very midst of the heathen worship, and among the spies in the emperor's palace. Axe and flame and furious beast and howling mob were to do their worst, but the Lord would walk beside His servants in the hottest persecution, or

lead them to victory in the fiercest conflict. The blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the Church, and over every lowly grave where lies a faithful witness for Christ, has evermore been written, "They hated Me without a cause." The hate and malice were against the Lord first. In China in 1900 the spirit of the persecutors was the same as in the first tremulous yet luminous kindling of the Christian era.

Bound With Two Chains.

Shall we seek Peter of Galilee, fisherman, disciple, Christ lover, apostle, gallant, impetuous, fearless minister of the new doctrine? We shall have to go to prison to find him for Herod has thrust him into a dismal cell, but he rests there; rests asleep and undismayed.

Peter it was, who bound and shut securely in a strong prison, was set free by an angel. Peter, the stalwart apostle caught securely in Herod's strong trap, guarded by a sturdy detail of Roman soldiers, fastened between two of them with two chains, but sleeping,

as his Lord had slept in the boat in the stormy night on Galilee. He giveth His beloved sleep, in times of stress and peril. Softly it sifts on the weary eyes. Sleep on, the Lord is on guard, Peter need not wake till he is called.

Night, and locked doors, the soldiers on watch. This is how the Lord rescued His servant in an hour when earthly aid was impossible. For Peter had more work to do, and Peter and you and I are immortal till our work is done. See how gloriously this rescue was accomplished, without fear or hurry, with authority and stately ease.

"And behold the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he said unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

And he went out and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was

done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

When they were past the first and second ward, they came to the iron gate that leadeth into the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street, and forthwith the angel departed from him.

And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hands of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark: where many were gathered together praying.

And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in and told how Peter stood before the gate.

And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

But Peter continued knocking, and when they had opened the door, they were astonished.

But he, beckoning unto them with his hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

And when Herod had sought for him and found him not, he examined the keepers and commanded that they be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Cæsarea, and there abode."

Dear little damsel Rhoda, whose office was to open the door for God's freed servant. She has had her successors in every age whenever and wherever woman's hand has unbarred a gate for some one who has been in doubt, in gloom, in despair. Woman's office is often to come after the angels, and complete their tasks.

That is a pretty incident related of General Washington, when at a time of peculiar trial in the Revolution, he stopped for awhile at the house of a friend. When he was leaving, a little maiden, the daughter of his host, opened the door for him. "I could wish you a better office, my dear," said the General, in his courtly old-school fashion. "Yes," says the little maiden. "To open it for you again when you return." Rhoda and her line are never absent, thank God, from this dear world of ours, where prison doors and other doors do fly open when God sends men forth.

Among the commonplace prison walls which close about us, and hem us in, as gloomily it seems, as the locks that barred Peter from the little band who prayed for him, are fettering conditions of health or privation, or remoteness from the stir of life. Circumstances may erect barriers which we cannot surmount, may clog our feet with heavy weights. Women who dwell in neighborless places, on the ranch with no one to speak to of the old home and its asso-

ciations, women exiled from their people because they cannot breathe in the climate of childhood, and must pitch the tent elsewhere, men, compelled by business to be most of the time away from their kindred, all homeless and homesick people everywhere, are in such a place as Peter was, when the soldiers were bound to him by a double chain. And God has some messenger of cheer for every child of His, who calls to Him out of any house of bondage. Do thy best, sorrowful captive. If there is nothing to do, trust and be still. Anticipate release. No circumstances can bind permanently one whom God beholds and loves.

THE CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN ANGELS

"The shepherds had an angel,
The wise men had a star,
But what have I, a little child,
To guide me home from far,
Where glad stars sing together
And singing angels are?—

"Christ watches me, His little lamb,
Cares for me day and night,
That I may be His own in heaven,
Where angels clad in white
Shall sing their glory, glory,
For my sake in the height."

—CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

NINE

THE CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN ANGELS

A VERY beautiful legendary interest attaches to the belief, more general in an earlier day than this, that every child has its guardian angel appointed to attend it through its pilgrimage. Why should we doubt this? Did not our Lord Himself say that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father? A good deal of confusion exists in common speech as to the personalty of angels. Surely we are to regard them as the Book shows us, not as the ransomed saints, who are our brothers and sisters and whom we shall join, as

> "One by one we go
> To the sweetness none may know,"

but as a separate order of beings, who are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs to salvation." As such, forever young, though time was not

born when their years began, forever obedient, forever tireless, they do the bidding of the Lord. I love to think that over each cradle bends the angel who is the infant's guardian, and that each little one who goes home in childhood, and each who hears the call to cross the river, in later years, is met at the gate by his peculiar angel, who can take his hand and lead him in and make him acquainted in the strange place.

A thousand times more do the children here need help from the outside in this world of manifold disaster and temptation, than do they, who are safe in the realms beyond sin. As suggestions to right doing and brave standing with Christ's people are borne to youthful minds, they know not how or whence, is it not pleasant to feel that they are of a verity, heaven-helped? Why shall the good angel be merely a myth, the product of a fertile fancy? Why minify the evil endeavors of the bad angel? A little girl once said that she did not want so many "sky-folk" about her, when told that the angels were watching her bed in the dark. But the

sky-folk make the earth-life brighter to the child who keeps that lovely companionship intact. When Christmas brings its blithe shimmer of beauty and merry jingle of bells, we like the children to sing with the Christmas angels. Because that home which is consciously angel-guarded will not miss the sweet secrets of contentment and thankfulness, which make home a type of heaven.

Mrs. Merrill E. Gates, with keen spiritual insight has told us her thought of the children's angels:

"The Master told us about them,
Or else we would not have known
Of the great, glad children's angels
Who stand for them near the throne.
The face of the Heavenly Father,
Their angels always behold;
They live in unbroken vision,
Afar in the city of gold.

"Their beautiful brows are lifted,
Evermore in dazzling sight
Of the Father's unseen glory,
His unapproachable light.
Yet His ineffable brightness
Does not blind, but fills them still
With higher rapture of service,
Sweeter worship of His will.

When Angels Come to Men

"These strong, glad worshipping angels
Who dwell in excess of light,
Loves, each, some dear little earth child,
And cares for him day and night.
We cannot know how they help him,
Nor what the mysterious tie,
That binds pure and deathless angels
To frail little ones that die.

"The Lord of that country sends them
On errands sweet but unknown,
To little "heirs of salvation,"
The jewels who are His own.
Sometimes in dingiest alleys,
Sometimes to beautiful homes,
To the little one He guardeth,
The starry bright angel comes.

"And then, though the little one sees not,
Nor knows the angel is there,
His dear little heart is lightened,
His form is suddenly fair.
For the glistering angel garments
Throw brightness into the place;
And glory as from the Father,
Falls on the childish face.

"So the strong and tender helpers
Cheer the glad, or the sad and lone.
But I think they oftenest visit
The fatherless, motherless one.
No little heart is unfriended,
His angel is near him still,
The little ones cannot perish!
It is not the Father's will!"

SOME OF OUR SHINING ONES

"We are on our journey home
Where Christ our Lord has gone;
We shall meet around His throne
When He makes His people one
In the new Jerusalem.

"We can see that distant home
Though clouds rise dark between;
Faith views the radiant dome
And a lustre flashes keen
From the new Jerusalem.

"Our hearts are breaking now
Those mansions fair to see;
O Lord, Thy heavens bow
And raise us up with Thee
To the new Jerusalem!"

TEN

SOME OF OUR SHINING ONES

I. Out of Sight, but Living Still.

NOT all the shining ones on the pearly shores are angels; many of them wear faces that we know as they look down from "the gold bar of heaven." How like a peal of jubilant bells rings Dean Alford's hymn, which I never repeat without a thrill of gladness.

"Ten thousand times ten thousand
In sparkling raiment bright,
The armies of the ransomed saints
Throng up the steeps of light.
'Tis finished, all is finished,
Their fight with death and sin,
Fling open wide the golden gates,
And let the victors in!

"What rush of hallelujahs
Fills all the earth and sky!
What ringing of a thousand harps
Bespeaks the triumph nigh!

Oh day for which creation
And all its tribes were made,
Oh, joy for all its former woes
A thousandfold repaid."

Long days of great suffering had been appointed to one precious friend. The mornings brought rest and refreshment to others; to her only an increasing languor and a helpless weakness, that was at last a great weight as hard to endure as pain itself. The house was keyed to the note of the invalid's chamber. Almost it seemed that life revolved around the bed where she lay, so far had receded the ordinary thoughts and so apart was the business of the world from her whose breath grew fainter day by day. Yet never before had the watchers understood the absorption of care-taking. There was something to do every minute. The trained nurse with her deft hand and quick eye and tender touch so blessedly sure and strong, could not do all. The family were on the alert too, and the servants were as sympathetic as if they had been kindred.

She who was to the last gasp her own

sweet wistful self, thoughtful of others as ever, wondered that she should be so slow in going. "You are all so tired," she said. "Why does not Jesus come?" Ah, no one else wanted Him to come yet, it seemed so impossible to spare her, though when the ineffable peace had settled on that calm brow, we knew it was better so. For her, hovering perhaps a little while in that room where she had suffered, looking down on that body which had been her home so long, expanding already in limitless life, there was a sense of such freedom, such ecstasy as she had never dreamed of feeling.

"If I could but tell them!" she murmured. "If I could but whisper how good it is to be going on, rising away over the great fields of space, passing the stars, never tired any more, never faint, never afraid, never lonesome again."

"They will know in their turn," said a voice in her ear, and she left the earth land here, and clad in the youth of heaven stepped within its gates.

Another oh! so precious, so priceless in

her goodness, her faith, her courage, had no long illness. She was busy in a hundred ways, her household, her mother's club, her church, her friends, the hospital where the crippled children were, the old ladies' home. It never had once occurred to her that she was an old lady, so warm and swift was the current of her blood, so multifold were her activities, so many there were who needed her. And so, when on a summer day, her children found her asleep, her Bible open in her lap, open at the chapter she loved best, "Let not your heart be troubled," they felt that she had been translated. Henceforth she too would be to them a messenger of the Father's loving kindness.

In the thickening dusk of a rainy November day, a woman sat desolate and comfortless beside her lonely hearth. A month ago her husband left her for the other land. She could not take up her broken life and go on, and with tearless eyes and folded hands, she let the days wear the slow hours away. "Shall I light the lamps?" said the maid, grieving for the stony sorrow she could not

melt. "No, I prefer the darkness, there is no light for me." Even as she spoke, the shadows seemed to lift, and a golden glow, faint but translucent grew in the quiet room, suffusing the books on the shelves, the desk where he used to sit, and the empty chair which had been his own, touching the widow's black gown with a soft radiance, and penetrating the bleak chill of her heart with a tender warmth. Something, some one, was in the room, She was aware of a presence, enfolding, vital, full of cheer, and a voice in her soul, said, "There is no more time for weeping. Arise and do thy work. Joy cometh in the morning." And from that hour, from youth to old age, the woman, forlorn no longer, arose and did her work, as if the one she loved had not left her side.

To one, intensely loved by kindred, and a wide circle of friends, the great angel, stepping over her threshold early in the breaking light of a winter's day, brought the surprise of home and heaven. Unobtrusive, gentle, patient, light-hearted, strong as steel though

fragile as porcelain, she had spent years of waiting for the angel's call. The one she had loved most, whose love had been her sunshine, was already "over yonder." It was so like her to slip away without jar or fuss, to say good-night as she always did, to be wafted as the flower-scents are wafted, into the presence of her Lord, and her dear ones. Heaven's morning for her! The shadows yet for us! Sweet was the call that bade her hasten home.

II. Of the Last Kind Angel.

"There is a reaper, whose name is Death,
And with his sickle keen,
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,
And the flowers that grow between."

I wish that we might feel that a step across from one room in the Father's house to another is easy and natural, and that we might not dread as we do, the look of the last kind angel. If we have often watched by those who go and have noted their first look of amazement and ecstasy we know that the angel who ushers the soul into the

immortal life, has a face that a child may trust, a face of radiant sweetness. Suppose that we choose John Bunyan for our guide, and with him take a glimpse of the welcome the angels give, when the angel, whom men call Death, has taken a pilgrim home.

"Now, just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold the city shone like the sun: The streets also were paved with gold: and in them walked many men with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal.

There were also of them that had wings and they answered one another without intermission, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.' And after that they shut up the gates; which when I had seen, I wished myself among them."

The last kind angel! And the shining ones on the bank of the river! And the bells of the city ringing for joy! And no more sickness, no more partings, no more sorrow. We ought to take the triumph and the com-

fort and the gladness of it, as an elixir of strength into our inmost souls.

Yet, how often our heart's cry is in the passionate protest of Lowell,

> "Not all the preaching since Adam
> Has made death other than death."

There is somehow such a finality about the still hands folded across the breast that throbs no longer. The bed we hollow for our darling's rest is so deep. The rain falls on it and the snow. We want what we have lost, so unutterably, and we are not granted what we want. And under our quiet, as we go to our business or stay at home, as we foot up a ledger or stitch a little frock, there surges vehemently the yearning for

> "The touch of a vanished hand
> And the sound of a voice that is still."

So intense is our appreciation of the first keen ache and relentlessness of grief, before the maimed life is adjusted to the necessity of gathering up the fragments that remain and going on, that in the house of mourning we are dumb. There is nothing to say.

Our friend is dead. What is the use of speech. Hand-clasp and loving look must suffice, with tender and silent sympathy.

Believe, oh! you who are in the trough of the sea, that there is firm ground waiting for you, and that they who have been ferried over to the desired haven have reached it happily. The Angel of Death is also the Angel of Life Everlasting. In the "world that lies about us like a cloud, a world we do not see," there are not dim spectres or mere airy ghosts, there are those who live and learn and love. This earth of ours is but the lower school. In heaven are the post-graduate courses. Nothing worth having here shall be lost there. No acquisition or art or endeavor, but shall have its apotheosis in that world of fuller light. And oh! so soon we shall be there too.

Said a minister to the parents of an only child, cut down like a flower in the loveliness of her eighteenth year, as together they stood beside her coffin: "You could have parted from this dear child and let her go from you to college, for four years. You

would not have felt you had lost her. You could have placed her hand in that of another and let her go from you to the other side of the globe, it might have been for many years. She would have been out of your sight—as she is now. But she might have been farther away from you than she is now.

"You cannot tell how soon, how very soon, you may be with her, where she is. And there she will be happy and busy and learning and waiting till you come."

We make that heaven where our Saviour is, a sort of visionary place, shorn of reality. Yet the things which are seen are temporal and the things which are unseen are eternal.

> "Beyond the frost chain and the fever
> I shall be soon,
> Beyond the rock-waste and the river
> Beyond the ever and the never,
> I shall be soon.
> Love, rest and home! Sweet hope,
> Lord, tarry not, but come!"

In this sweet word of the Master, is assured comfort for every one of us. "If it were not so I would have told you. I go

to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also."

Just here enters in the comfort of the angels. The Book is as full of heaven as it is of earth. In our morning newspapers Africa and India and Australia, San Francisco and Chicago and New York are all neighboring states and cities, closely allied by telegraph and telephone. The Book places the two worlds as close together and by tracts that are as well worn as those across the continent, by paths as straight as those the ocean steamers take across the sea, the angel messengers go and come. And the spirits of those who are released from the tenement of clay and who henceforth are in the house not made with hands, traverse those unseen pathways too. This is the world of shadow. That is the world of light.

Often in the very act of dissolution, the one who is going has a glimpse of the unseen, has a waft of its fragrance. To some of us, the glory is so real that both here and there is indeed Immanuel's land.

Could we but take in the grace that sends

the last kind angel at the right time, because God's time, we might indeed be lonely, but the loneliness would be cheered by a great hope. To Jesus, heaven was very near: the angels were within call; the Father's house was not far off, and did not Jesus tell us not to be troubled? Is not He the Way? Whittier sings,

"With silence only as their benediction,
God's angels come,
Where, in the shadow of a great affliction,
The soul sits dumb.

"Yet would we say what every heart approveth,
Our Father's will,
Calling to Him the dear ones whom He loveth,
Is mercy still.

"Not upon us or ours the solemn angel
Hath evil wrought;
The funeral anthem is a glad evangel;
The good die not!

"God calls our loved ones, but we lose not wholly
What He has given;
They live on earth in thought and deed, as truly
As in His heaven."

When Mr. Despondency and his daughter, Miss Much-Afraid, heard that the post had been sent for them, they were not disturbed.

"Myself and my daughter," said Mr. Despondency, "have behaved troublesomely in every company. My will and my daughter's is, that our desponds and slavish fears be by no man ever received from the day of our departure forever."

"The last words of Mr. Despondency were Farewell Night. Welcome Day. His daughter went through the river, singing, but none could understand what she said." Bonar's words have a lilt,

> "I heard the voice of Jesus say,
> I am this dark world's light,
> Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise
> And all thy day be bright."

And Whittier in another lyric bids us walk on steadfastly,

> "For death is but a covered way
> That leadeth into light,
> Wherein no blinded child can stray
> Beyond the Father's sight."

III. Their Influence With Us, Though We See Them Not.

In many a sweet thought that wafts in with the breath of lilies on a summer's night,

in many a remembered verity of character that stimulates us to courage and exertion, in many an impulse to good, that comes to us from the outside, our dear ones gone are alive here.

No life once lived on the earth bravely and well, ever quite ceases to be. The home misses the bodily presence, the place is vacant at the table, the good-morning and good-evening courtesies have ceased. But in a thousand subtle expressions the life that was here yesterday is here to-day. We do certain things in a certain way, because mother did them thus. We accept certain ethical opinions because father exemplified their beauty as he went out and in among men. We carry on charities, we comfort sorrows, we care for age and infirmity, we are compassionate to the world's need, because those who went before us, taught us that selfish lives are abortive, and generous lives are fruitful. Influence does not die when the clod falls on the coffin. The great and good who have gone over to the majority still live and speak, still uplift and

inspire those who are toiling here. On this little point of the present, where we have our footing, we reach back and clasp hands with those who are gone, as with those who are to come. That is a beautiful conception of death, that makes us think of our lost as just "away," not beyond our loving and our remembering, and not beyond remembering and loving us.

> "Is there never a chink in the world above
> Where they listen for words from below?"

sings Jean Ingelow. Ah, yes, there are gates ajar, through which our voices steal in and our songs break, to mingle with theirs among the glorified. They are alive still, and being alive, who shall say that they have ceased to care. Motherless and fatherless children, for aught we know, have their rough paths smoothed by those who tended them ere they were called higher. Weak and faltering men may be strengthened against temptation by some true love that never failed them on earth, and will never fail them in heaven.

> "Christ leads us through no darker rooms
> Than He went through before,"

and to Him, at least once while He wore our humanity, there descended two mighty ones from heaven, who conversed with Him as familiarly as did His disciples. On the mount of transfiguration these two spoke of the exodus, the going out, which Christ should accomplish, and they, Moses and Elias, as alive as Christ and the disciples were, talked with the Master there.

One other most comforting experience is ours, when as the flower from the stalk, we see a new life repeating the sweetness of a life that has been finished here. In the glad succession of family life, there is no blither, dearer thing, than that familiar recurrence of type which makes the grandparent reappear in the grandchild, and which perpetuates in a family line the noble qualities of those who have passed out of sight. The rare fortitude, the rich imagination, the physical beauty, the spiritual charm, that inhere in some races, are legacies from ancestry, and it is no slight thing for which to give God thanks, that one is the child of parents passed into the skies.

In this sense, every Christian shall live on

in his descendants to the final crash of time.

The Book closes as it begins with the rustle of angel robes and the lifting of angel wings. Revelation shows us heaven as St. John saw it on Patmos, but human language is poor and an earthly vocabulary small, to tell of the brightness and the joy that await God's people there. Gems of translucent fire, walls of jasper, a city of towers and palaces, a sea of glass, and in the midst, One on whose head are many crowns, and who shall lead His own to the rewards laid up for them, where Father, Son and Spirit reign without end. "At Thy right Hand," said the Psalmist, "are pleasures forevermore." And there shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the "Lamb's Book of Life."

EVERY-DAY ANGELS

In days obscured by veiling folds
Of grief, or clouded o'er with dread,
While dumb suspense relentless holds
Its sword above the shrinking head,
Then, in the soul's acute despair,
Comes help in answer to our prayer.

Since to the dark Gethsemane
The pitying angels, soon or late
Must haste with tenderest ministry,
And each new day is but the gate
To some rich temple, rising fair
That builds to heaven a golden stair.

God keep us through the common days;
The level stretches, white with dust,
When thought is tired, and hands upraise
Their burdens feebly, since they must.
In days of slowly fretting care,
Then need we most the answered prayer.

ELEVEN

EVERY-DAY ANGELS

"Such chances to be angels
As we poor mortals find!"

WITH the words about the bright home beyond, we might close these talks about our angelic friends and helpers. We might—but another chapter of a different order remains to be written. For this is a world beautiful too, this every-day earth world in which we have each passing year so many exquisite days, of flower and leaf and thorn, of cloud and rain and snow, of happy times in happy homes, of treasures that make us rich in hope and love and faith. And in this world there are angels too, who jostle us on the pavement, and give us a lift when we are down, and light homely fires for us on homely hearths. Angels of the fireside who kiss the good man when he comes home tired at

night and wave him good-bye from the window in the morning. Angels of motherhood who tuck little children in when nights are cold and the wild winds rave around the corners. Angels of patience, of discernment, of sympathy; angels who have time to talk and to listen, and leisure from themselves to cheer those whose burdens are heavy.

I think of the angels, who do God's errands, often as I am in a great town, and the ambulance bell rings, and, as if by magic a path is cleared through the hurrying tangle of moving conveyances. The ambulance has its attendant angels and they have the right of way. Keen-faced, steady-eyed, deft-handed young fellows, who are beginning now the angel-work they will continue in unto gray hairs, the work of soothing pain, of healing sickness, of curing by the knife if need be that which else would kill. They go about the battle-field when the armies fight no longer, they pick up the wounded, they save life; it is their blessed mission, in which they are like Him who

walked in Galilee. In the mining regions we find them, in alleys swept by pestilence, in the fever-wards of hospitals, and in any home that needs their ministry, God's angels of the modern day, though they never dream of their nobleness.

An angel of tenderness was one whom I remember, a woman who was left in early girlhood to be the mother-sister of a large family, who put her own life and hopes aside, and shouldered her load, and bore it without a murmur and died in spinsterhood having effaced herself to the end. Not a brother or a sister ever adequately understood what she had done, or half knew how to thank her, but God knew and, saint of His as she was, He also called her angel.

We may recall many such lives of little sacrifices and of great ones, of thoughtfulness for others, of self-forgetfulness. The names of such are recorded on no roll book of fame, but God keeps them and to them has been given the hidden manna and the white stone with the new name.

Until we go out of this place of service there

can be few finer things for which to long than just to have the angel-character plainly stamped upon our inner lives, and showing through the outer. Of St. Peter it was said at one time, that his very shadow as he passed by, made sick folk better. There be some among us, who do not suspect it, who thus purify the miasmas of the low mood, and hearten the depressed and clear the atmosphere. There is blessing in their very shadow.

> "Meek souls there are who little dream
> Their daily life an angel's theme,
> Nor that the rod they bear so calm
> In heaven may be a martyr's palm."

The angels of every-day life have this in common that they go on the king's errands, and they do not loiter by the way. The king's business requireth haste, so they cannot be laggards, and whether He send them to nourish a starving soul in an avenue mansion or a garret chamber, they go with equal zeal and with no reluctance. These angels may stand behind a counter, or sweep a floor, may paint a picture or write an epic,

may teach, as some of them do, a lifetime in the public school, or sit in a professor's chair in a great university. If they are the king's messengers, and do the king's bidding they are His angels of the common day, and when night falls and their eyes are closed, He will give them their reward. God grant that we may belong to their order of consecrated lives.

Of some dear every-day angel many a man's heart is a shrine. Rough work is for men's hands yet, though women have been compelled, as never before in the world's history, to go out and fend for themselves. Yet the vast multitudes who crowd the earliest out-going cars and boats in our cities are composed of men. They wear shabby clothes. They carry dinner-pails. Their hours are long and their labor is monotonous. You would not suspect them of sentiment, these throngs of hard workingmen, any more than you would suspect of sentiment the broker or the banker or the railway president. Yet, the sentiment is what sweetens toil and makes drudgery no pen-

ance. Mary or Hannah, or Janie, the wife, the sister, the daughter, in the house doing the little things of the day as best she can, keeps the roughest man as in sanctuary, and is indeed his every-day angel.

Shall we not let this thought inspire us to seek for the divine side of the commonplace, and make us more conscientious than ever about the little things we do and the little words we say? To refrain from the sharp word, to restrain the jeer that is unworthy, to speak only words of cheer and kindness, to help and not to hinder, are among the obligations of those who would wear Christ's name, and follow in His footprints. To glorify the little task by the spirit in which it is done, is to grow into a fitness to undertake the larger one when God sends it. While we are preparing to be His saints, we may be His angels, and like those who stand before Him on high, find our chief delight in His service.

"What is man's chief end?" "To glorify God, and enjoy Him forever."

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